

## Five Senses in a Cup of Coffee

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Summary: Before Petra became a connoisseur in preparing coffee, she is taught by Levi, and she remembers them through each of her five senses. (Rivetra)

### Five Senses in a Cup of Coffee

A bitter aroma drifts in the air on the morning of Petra Ral's first day in the Scouting Legion. Unfamiliar to her senses, she wrinkles her nose and timidly makes her way to the kitchen. She let her hands slide against the greying cobblestone walls, secretly learning the passageways of her new, perhaps even final, dwelling place. To her knowledge, she, along with three other men, is recruited by the esteemed Humanity's Strongest Soldier, Captain Levi. The sound of running water leads her to the kitchen and in it, a man stands facing the sink, preoccupied. She's only seen her Captain once, during the welcoming ceremony yesterday at dusk, but it was more than enough to leave an impression on her. Testing the waters, she doesn't chirp a greeting, lest she wanted to startle her Captain, but instead gave a polite \_good morning, Captain Levi. \_He turns his head sideways and acknowledges her presence. "Ral," he says, his voice cool but unassuming. "Can I fix you anything for breakfast, Captain?" she asks, keeping a respectable distance from him. "No, coffee is all I need this morning," he pauses, anticipating the thirsty look most of his comrades give him at the mere mention of the black elixir. Petra blinks and thinks to herself, '\_So that's what it's called, coffee.' \_"Coffee?" Levi gestures his hand, offering her a cup. She takes it and, as if by muscle memory, her lips immediately meets the rim and makes the irrevocable mistake of taking a sip. Petra debates with herself for a split second whether or not to spit out the scalding hot, black, bitter water to spare her throat from further pain but risk disrespecting her Captain that would ultimately send her packing faster than you can say breakfast, or man up and gulp it down and let the shock overcome her with numbness. Her faÃ§ade isn't doing any help with concealing her inner struggle: her eyes begin to water and her cheeks puff, obviously fighting to swallow.

\_So this is what coffee feels like.\_

Needless to say, the Captain did not recruit her for her coffee drinking abilities, but for something far more useful to eliminating the titans. At breakfast the next day, she learns the names of the three other recruits. Erd, Gunther and Auruo. Their Captain joins them shortly, holding a pot in one hand and a stack of cups in the other. "Oh, let me help you with those, Captain," Petra leaves her spot to rush over to him. "Ral, I'm your Captain, not the king. I got this," he reassures. Auruo snickers as he watches Petra retreat to her seat. Erd takes the cups and passes them on to the rest of the squad. When they have all settled, Levi breaks the silence. "Welcome to the Scouting Legion," he doesn't bother to stand up, but instead examines the cup he is holding peculiarly. "Take a look at the faces you will be working side by side with. Four individuals displaying extraordinary performances in every expedition. Each, lucky enough to survive them all," Levi sets down his cup to look at each one of them. "And I'd like to keep it that way." He shifts his steely gaze to a more relaxed one and added, "But at the dining table, you are all at ease. Here, eat. Drink. Permit yourself to be yourself without the ranks, without the titles."

They share a small feast of boiled eggs, porridge and bread. Erd took two trips back to the kitchen to refill their cups with coffee, with the Captain's blend being the strongest among the four. Remembering her first encounter with coffee and her Captain the previous day, Petra opts for a safest choice of beverage: water. Quietly, Petra looks at each of her new team mates, taking in mental notes of what to remember them by. She only needs the smell of coffee to stir this memory alive.

\_So this is what coffee smells like.\_

Since their first shared breakfast as a team, Petra slowly learns to reconsider coffee in the following months. She decides to get up one morning, earlier than the usual. Her foot immediately recoils as it touches the floor, the coldness of it new to her daily rituals. She fumbles for her footwear and dresses appropriately and soon walks out of her room. By now, she has already learnt almost all of the passageways, but she still slides her hand against the wall, this time to imprint on her senses the events of this day. The moon's dusty light still hangs in the corridor before the kitchen, the darkest place before the brightness in the kitchen spills in her eyes. As expected, her Captain is already awake, if he even slept the night before at all bemuses her, already preparing a fresh batch of coffee.

"Captain?" she calls out softly. Levi had to double take to make sure he isn't dreaming, because no one in the Scouting Legion ever wakes up so early on a rest day, save for him and perhaps Commander Erwin. "Petra? What are you doing at this ungodly hour?" Petra hides a smile as this is the first time he's called her by her first name. "Iâ€¦ I came to give coffee another chance," she smiles cheekily. \_Petra Ral, \_Levi thinks,\_ wakes up earlier than the sun, she becomes the sun herself. \_"Curious what's in it that makes us reach for a cup of it every morning?" "Not quite, Captain," as she takes a few steps towards him. "Rather, curious what I'm missing out in the caffeine department and how do I stay awake?" Levi doesn't immediately respond. Instead, he takes out a canister from the cupboard and puts

it on the countertop. Next, he takes out the cups and the pot and starts rinsing them. "The key to a good cup of coffee starts with clean utensils," Levi tells her over his shoulder. Of course, that and pair it with her Captain's obsessive cleaning habits, which she learned in the months of being in his squad. She opens a drawer for a dish towel and initiates to dry the utensils. They work quietly, their characters tiptoeing along the borders of rank and a stemming bond. She observes how his face relaxes as the cool water touches his skin. The sun is now softly illuminating the room, making Levi's wet skin glisten. She sets the dry cups on the table and returns to the kitchen. He is already filling a pot with water and about to set it on the stove. "Bring this to a boil and come over here," he walks towards the countertop to ready the coffee. Petra trails after lighting fire to the stove.

"Take a look at this," Levi opens the canister and show Petra beans varying in shades of brown. "These are your coffee beans. Secret to a good coffee obviously comes from quality beans," Levi tells her as she scoops a handful. "They smell good," she looks up to tell him only to catch a glimpse of Levi wearing a kind, unguarded smile.

\_So this is what coffee looks like.\_

She begins joining him regularly in making coffee for the squad. Whenever there is an excess in supplies, she likes to experiment with different blends, adding a little something special to it occasionally. Soon, the squad begins to ask for her \_special blend\_ "€" creamy and bittersweet with notes of cinnamon, sometimes, vanilla. But the Captain prefers his strong, still. It helps him stay awake while signing important papers. She discovers this one late evening when she found him in the dining area, coffee in one hand, and a pen in the other. "Oh, hi Captain. Need any help with those?" she pulls out a chair to sit adjacent to him. "Levi," he says. She wears a confused look on her face. "In private, call me Levi," he says as he looks up from his paper works. Petra honestly feels uncomfortable about this new ground but nonetheless is pleased her Captain feels relaxed around her.

In the following months, she begins bringing him coffee in his study room at night before she shuts herself in her own room. In some nights, she lingers for a moment in his quiet company, picks up a neglected sheet of paper in the corner, or arranges the pens in their holders and then she bids him good night before she treads out of his room.

One night, she's surprised to find him in his usual spot - paperwork-free.

"I guess you don't need the caffeine boost tonight then?" She hesitates to enter his room, his coffee in her hand. Levi stands up to pull the door ajar, "Quite the contrary, Petra." He gestures for her to take a seat and make herself comfortable. "Wait here; I'll fix you a cup." She could only imagine what he is up to as she looks around his room "€" too immaculately clean for a soldier. He returns with another cup of coffee in his hand and she could immediately smell the hints of cream and sugar in it. He hands it to her and takes his seat opposite her. They quietly enjoy their cup; Petra sips after him, anticipating his next word. He notices her anxious look when he puts down his cup. "Petra, you can relax. You're not in trouble; you're doing fine as a member of my squad." These words do

not comfort her and he quickly adds, "Nor am I taking any advantage of you tonight. So, relax." Her soft chuckle reassures him. "Then what am I here for?" she faces him, beaming.

His shoulder drops a little as he picks up his cup. "To talk," he says simply.

\_So this is what coffee sounds like.\_

Petra sits back, more relaxed this time. She sips from her cup; takes note on how he has almost perfected her preferred blend. "How do you know how I like my coffee?" she starts, swirls her cup gently in her hand. He crosses his legs and tells her as a matter-of-factly, "Yours has a distinct aroma, Petra. You can't exactly miss it." He thinks she must have taken it wrongly and adds, "It's sharp, it's mellow, and it's sweet â€" quite delicate, but still has a kick in it. Quite like you, if you'd ask me." "Quite like me, huhâ€" she mutters, thinks to herself where he is heading. "I could quite say the same to you, too, Levi," her fingertip lazily tracing the rim of her cup. "How my coffee is as black as my soul isn't it?" "Quite the contrary, \_Captain\_," she lilts. "How, like your coffee, you are nippy and harsh and almost scalding hot upon first impression," she pauses to study his expression, expecting to find a scorned one, but to her surprise he is calm, almost eager to hear the rest of what she has to say. "But it isn't all that bad as how you hear it from other people." Clearly looking interested, he leans a little and asks, "Really? How so? How do you change your first impression of something bitter, something that burns your tongue to something good?" "You can't change your first impressions, Levi," she giggles mirthfully. Amused, Levi waits for her to answer his question. "You either take it as it is, or add a little something really nice to it, you know. That way, you still get to appreciate its original blend, enjoy what everyone else is having, but the only difference is you're enjoying it from a slightly different take. Like what I did with mine." "Something really niceâ€" he mutters. "Hm?" Petra looks at him. "Add something really nice to a bitter blend, you say," Levi takes a sip from his cup, puts it down and leans over to her. He locks his gaze with her, and she doesn't take her eyes away from his. "You're something \_really nice\_, Petra."

She tastes his sincerity in his lips. "So this is what coffee tastes like," she tells him.

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